

Interned Germans made shorts from black-out curtains

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As some twelve hundred German aliens moved out of a North of England internment camp - once a large cotton mill - Italian aliens, who had been arrested after Mussolini's war declaration, moved in on Tuesday. The Germans, who had been at the camp a few weeks, were marched out of the mill and through the barbed wire entanglements and, under military escort, were sent by train to Liverpool. Many of them are now in the isle of Man. By Wednesday night, approximately 600 Italians were in the mill.

The German aliens, many of them wealthy business men, made the best of their stay in the weaving sheds. They slept on camp beds and helped in preparing the food. They were permitted to buy 'extras' with their own money, but none of them was allowed to have a newspaper.

They whiled away the time by playing cards or chatting. Most of them spoke of their disgust of Hitler and his methods. They took exercise on a field adjoining the mill, and during the hot days at one period of their stay at the mill they sunbathed.

Many wore shorts. This demand for light clothing gave one of them an idea for making some pocket-money. He pulled down the newly-fitted black-out curtains and cut and stitched them into shorts. This nimble-fingered German completed a pair in half-an-hour, and charged 2s 6d a pair. He was dealt with by the military authorities, and probably found that the venture did not cover expenses.

As each of the Italians reached the mill he was medically examined and asked to give various particulars before being shown up to his quarters. Whereas the Germans had ranged in age from youths to elderly men, most of the Italians who had arrived by Wednesday were of middle age or over.

Some came by police patrol cars, others in a Manchester Corporation double decker bus, and yet others by train. Nearly all of them had their belongings in attaché cases or suitcases.

About half of the Italians in the camp on Wednesday were working-class men. The Italians had hoped against hope that their country would remain non-belligerent, and every one of them had a sad look as he was taken into the camp.

For the first day at least there was none of the fancy dishes for which the Italians are famous. The aliens helped to prepare and serve good, wholesome stew. They could help themselves to as much as they wished from the dixie brought round the dining quarters.

New sanitary arrangements - as good as those provided for the soldiers - have been substituted for those formerly used by the cotton operatives.

Up to 2000 aliens can be accommodated in the three storeys of the mill.

Note from Maggy

From a historian's viewpoint, there is little to positively link this article with Warth Mill, apart from the mention of its having three storeys. It appears to deliberately not name the site, understandably. However, in comparison with the accounts given by internees, it paints an anodyne picture of conditions.

It reads like a propaganda piece, produced by the Ministry of Information. It would be of interest to discover if other local researchers elsewhere have come across a strangely similar piece in their own local paper.